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The use of alcoholic beverages,

gambling, and the eating of pork (as well as certain other

"unclean" animals) are specifically prohibited in the Quran.

The chieftains and commoners, more as a matter of taste

than of piety, infrequently break the first two of these

demands. The government elite, as has been noticed, finds

its chief diversion in them. No one in the three groups,

including the several Christians among the officials, ever

eats pork. There was a peculiar tale current in the town

of a Kurdish tribe "somewhere in the mountains" who eat

the flesh of swine, but it is probably fabulous, like the

bears who carry off women as mates or the numerous accounts

of buried treasure. The Nestorians, however, hunt the wild

boar and eat it. Blasphemy, as a matter of cursing, is

an everyday affair, but in all the groups of the town it

was impossible to find anyone who challenged religion.

Some of the better educated officials and teachers, to be

sure, exhibited views which might be termed "liberal," but

none was a serious unbeliever. There is perhaps a reason

for this, the almost religious regard for all written or

printed material, so common in the Middle East. A teacher,

confronted by the Quran on one hand and an atheist pamphlet

on the other, is convinced that in some way both are true,

because both are printed, and can either be reconciled or

exist, equally valid, side by side.

The Muslim religious calendar is lunar, dated from
the flight of the Prophet from Mecca in 622 A.D., and con-
sists of twelve months. Because it is based on the rotation
of the moon about the earth, rather than that of the earth

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doors at some favored spot, such as the waterfall of Baykhal, and there is dancing accompanied by flutes and drums. It might be mentioned that on these days, as well as Jayjani Qurban, many persons, particularly the girls, stain their hands with henna, just as at a wedding.

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The second observance is concerned with the curious figure of Khidir Elyas and takes place in the autumn. "The mulla has nothing to say about Khidir Elyas, nor does he tell the people when the days come. A few people do not recognize these days." Khidir Elyas (Arabic, Khidir, "the Green One," and Elyas, Elijah) is a peculiar character of folklore, the belief in whom is singularly widespread in the Middle East. He has been discussed in some detail in a large number of works treating popular religion in the Islamic world, and appears to be a synthesis of such heroes of romance as Gilgamesh, Moses, Elijah, and Alexander the Great.¹ In Upper Egypt there are supposed to be two persons who travel together, Khidir and Elyas, and in other places only the one. His salient characteristics are his power to confer blessings and his immortality, for he is believed to have drunk from the Fountain of Life. The following narrative was recorded in Rowanduz:

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Khidir Elyas is a holy man who lives forever. He walks at night and chases away evil spirits. Whoever experiences misfortune need only cry out to him for aid. One night I was bringing a load of rice to Rowanduz by mule. The mule lost his footing and fell. I shouted, "O Khidir Elyas, I have

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¹For example, Tritton, 1951, p. 49.

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fasted for you and you should come to my help." Out of the night a man appeared who asked me my difficulty. He helped me get the mule to his feet and reload the rice. The two of us were walking along together, talking, and suddenly I discovered I was alone. Khidir Elyas lived long ago and God gave him such power to do good that he disappeared. This is why people ask his help while he is gone. When Jesus will come again with Ahmad the Mahdi, Khidir Elyas must be with them, for otherwise they cannot come.

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Persons in Rowanduz who choose to do so fast "for Khidir Elyas" for three days in the fall. Between sunrise and sunset they do not allow themselves food, drink, or tobacco. Others distribute gifts of food or clothing to the poor. Housewives make a sweet called Halaywat Khidir Elyas which is exchanged between households at this time. The exact dates of the observance could not be obtained, save that it "came just before winter." This interesting custom does not have the sanction of the mullas and the purists in the town, and is not followed by all.

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With the Sayran and Khidir Elyas observances, the "official" faith of Islam has been left behind, and the next subject of popular religion which requires consideration is the matter of the shaykh or holy man. Occasionally, this title is aristocratic and inherited in the male line, but it is most often accorded to persons who, because of their piety and the miraculous power they seem to enjoy, have acquired widespread reputations. Such as these can be powerful chieftains, noted for their justice, or the most humble of commoners. They are reputed to have the ability to effect miracles during their lifetimes, and this power continues to exist in their graves after death. Many of

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Shaykh Muhammad at Hajji Uman. This is the most famous of the group and is believed to effect miraculous cures. It is said that the Shepherd used to take out the sheep of Shaykh Muhammad each day. The pasturage was not good, and Shaykh Muhammad wondered why his sheep were so fat and healthy. One day he concealed himself and was amazed to see the Shepherd fly off through the air, with the sheep flying behind him in a line, to some rich, faroff mountain meadow. Thus Shaykh Muhammad learned of the power of this man, and asked the people to visit the Shepherd's grave before his own. A merchant in Rowanduz, one 'Abd al-Sattar, claimed to have cured an ailment which he described as "sand in the urine" by drinking water obtained near this shrine.

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Some of these shrines may be of considerable antiquity, and an indication of this is the fact that they are in most cases associated with trees. In a region which has almost been denuded of heavier timber, it is striking to find a lone oak on some barren hillside with the grave of a holy man beneath its branches. The townspeople of Rowanduz were unable to comment on this association, but investigation among the villagers might reveal some interesting views. It seems quite clear, however, that a pagan survival is represented here, a complex dating from a time in which some religious significance was attached to trees or groves. It might be remarked that cutting down such a tree, however great the need for wood, was believed to bring the greatest catastrophe. People visit these shrines for a variety of reasons, those suffering from some "incurable" malady, women who wish a male child, or men who believe themselves hampered by misfortune. The magical power in the person of the holy man, alive or dead, is termed baraka

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